Apprising world leaders about Indo-Pak relations

1997. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister during his three nations tour in May, 2003 met top world leaders and briefed them on the developments in India-Pakistan relations besides discussing bilateral ties; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Apart from bilateral relations, the situation in South Asia was *inter alia* discussed in Prime Minister's meetings with the world leaders during his three nations visit in May, 2003. Prime Minister's initiative of extending once again the hand of friendship to Pakistan received wide support and appreciation and his interlocutors expressed hope that Pakistan would reciprocate. All of them spoke strongly against the menace of terrorism.

Retrenchment of foreign labourers by Saudi Arabia

†1998. SHRI MOTILAL VORA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that the Government of Saudi Arabia has planned to retrench foreign labourers;

(b) if so, the number of Indian labourers likely to be rendered jobless as a result thereof;

(c) whether Government have held any talks with Saudi Arabia in this regard;

(d) if so, the details thereof along with the outcome of the talks; and

(e) the steps being taken by Government to provide employment to Indian labourers returning from Saudi Arabia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (d) Yes. In recent years Saudi Government has announced as a part of its national policy a number of

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

steps to promote the employment of Saudi nationals which will affect all expatriate nationals working in that country. This programme is being implemented gradually. There has been no immediate impact on Indian expatriate labourers so far.

(e) Does not arise.

Equipments lying unutilised in Ministry

†1999. SHRIMATI SAROJ DUBEY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that communication equipments worth crores of rupees are lying unutilised with Ministry of External Affairs;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Ministry propose to sell them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c)The High Frequency Radio Communication (HFRC) Project was initiated in 1987 with a view to providing a reliable and independent standby communications arrangement with selected Indian Missions and Posts abroad for use during emergencies and the shutting down of local telecom networks. A sanction of Rs. 17 crores was issued for the project in 1991 (a revised sanction was subsequently issued for little over Rs. 31.59 crores in 1992). The project faced technical and operational problems after implementation, including high recurring maintenance cost.

2. In 1997 the Public Accounts Committee asked that this project be re-evaluated by an Expert Group. While agreeing that wireless provides the only dependable means of communications that does not require support of a local network, due to continuing operational and technical problems as also availability of alternatives based on more modern technology, the Expert Group recommended in January, 2000 that the HFRC network be terminated.

3. In accordance with the directions of the Expert Group the HFRC network was shut down in mid-2001. The equipment is being disposed off to the best advantage of Government.

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